

'I sometimes wish that we would have some nicer food and different kinds of things to eat,' a wood-cutter's daughter tells her father one evening. Her simple request sparks a fantastical chain of events that sees the lives of the wood-cutter and his daughter improved by the mysterious 'Mushkil Gusha', the Remover of Difficulties. On the following Thursday night, however, the wood-cutter and his daughter both forget to commemorate Mushkil Gusha – and their lives take another dramatic and unexpected turn, changing forever...

This timeless teaching-story has been recited on Thursday nights in the East for generations. Part of a rich body of literature from Central Asia and the Middle East, *The Tale of Mushkil Gusha* is one of many stories collected by the late Afghan author and thinker, Idries Shah.

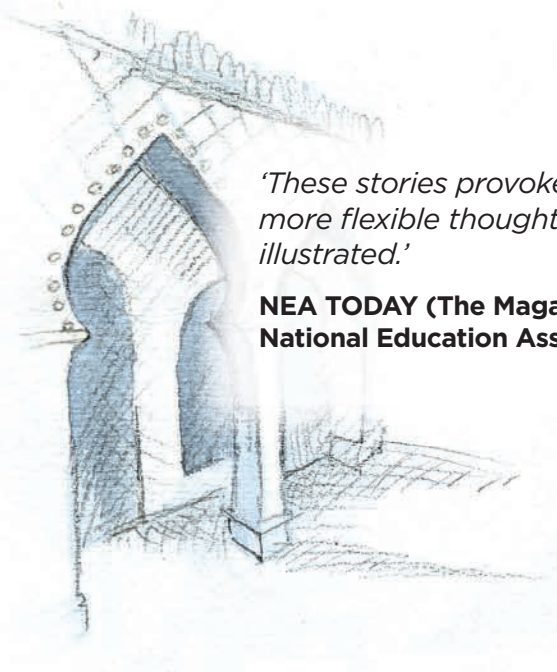
'These teaching-stories can be experienced on many levels. A child may simply enjoy hearing them, an adult may analyse them in a more sophisticated way. Both may eventually benefit from the lessons within.' **ALL THINGS CONSIDERED, NPR**

'Shah has collected hundreds of Sufi tales... In this tradition, the line between stories for children and those for adults is not as clear as it seems to be in Western cultures... the lessons are important for all generations.' **SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL**

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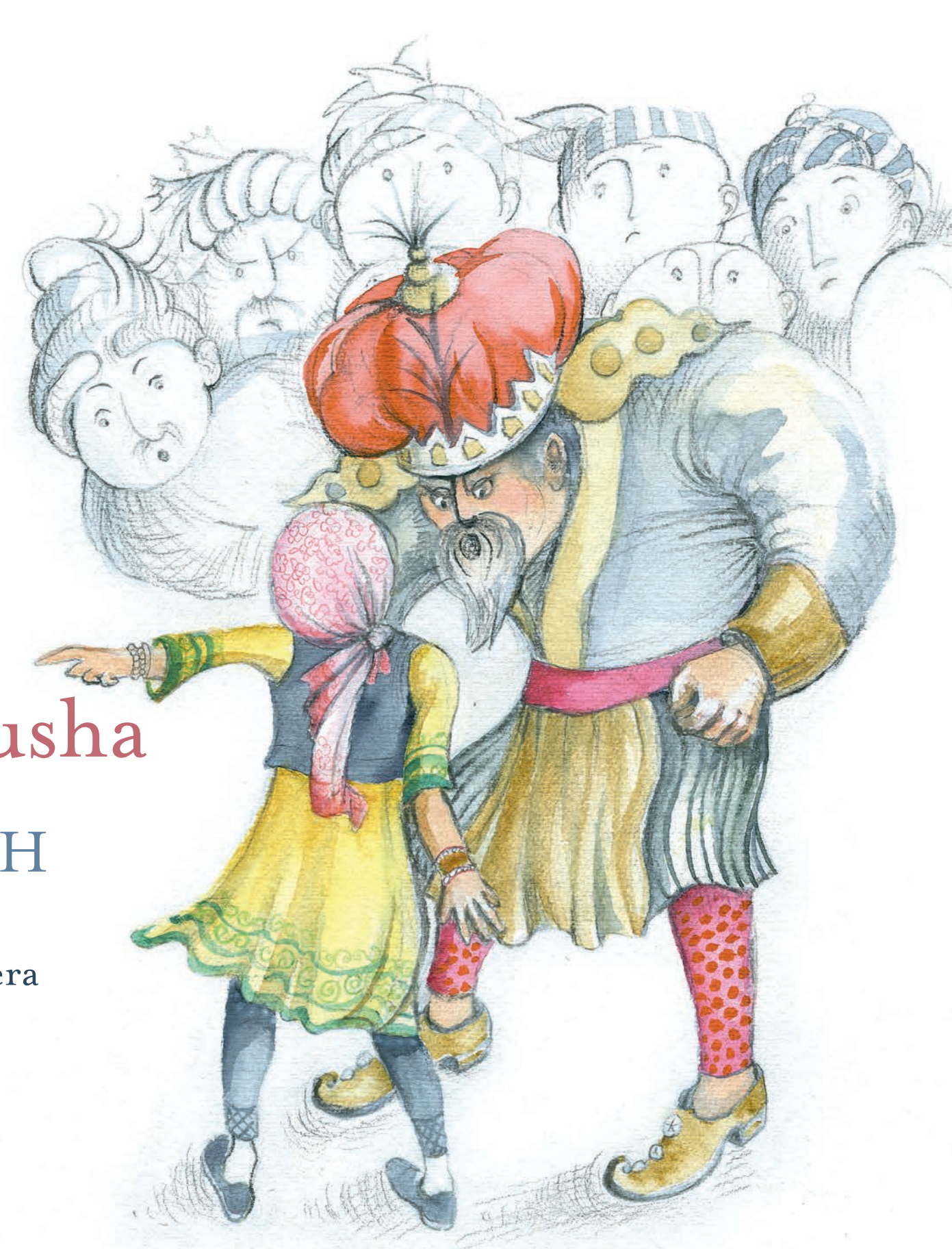
'These stories provoke fresh insight and more flexible thought in children. Beautifully illustrated.'

**NEA TODAY (The Magazine of the
National Education Association, USA)**

The Story of Mushkil Gusha

by IDRIES SHAH

Illustrated by Carol Betera



The Story *of*
Mushkil Gusha

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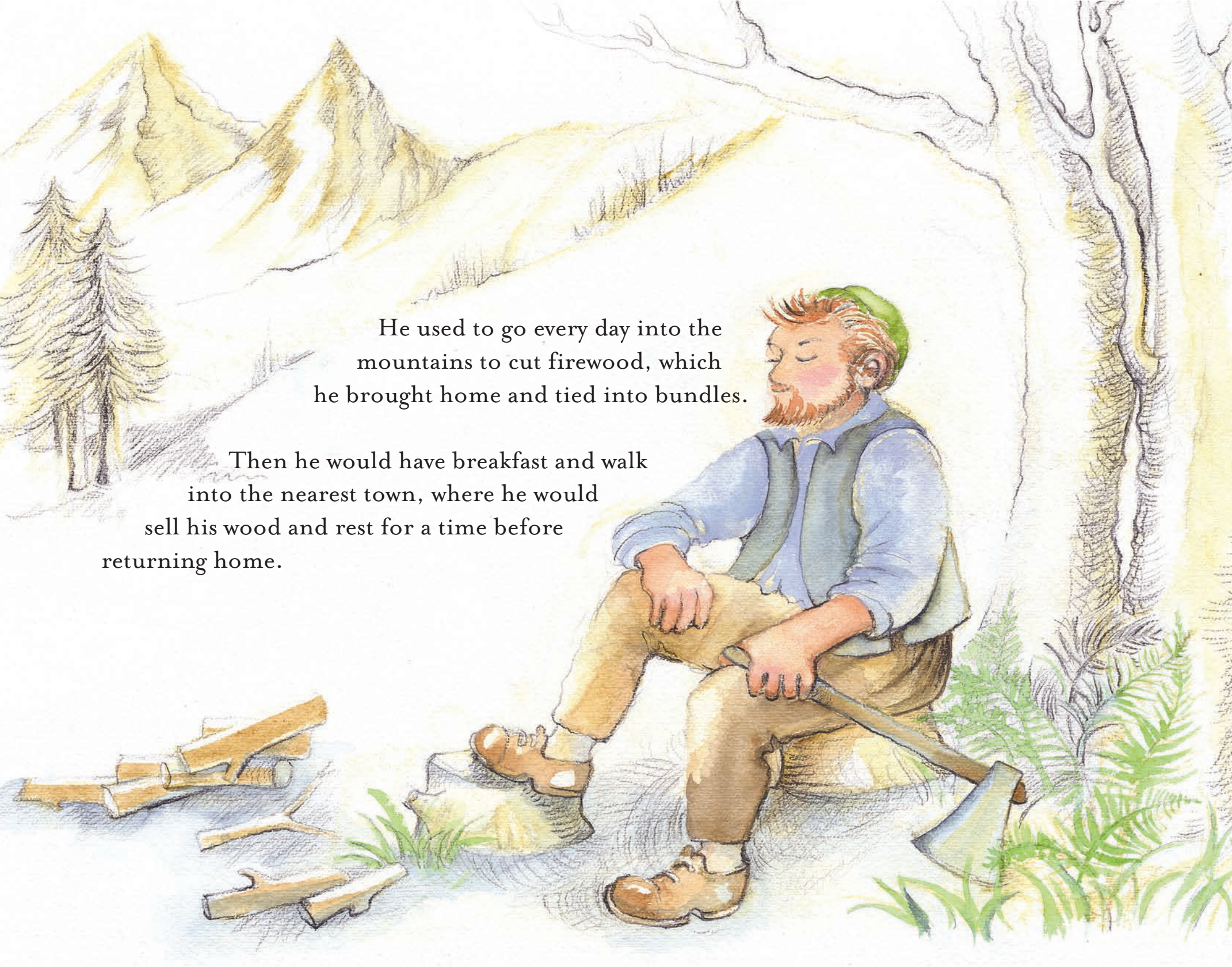
The Story *of* Mushkil Gusha

IDRIES SHAH



Once upon a time, not a thousand miles from here, there lived a poor wood-cutter, who was a widower, and his little daughter.



A watercolor illustration of a man with a beard and a green cap, wearing a blue shirt and brown trousers, sitting on a log stump. He is holding an axe in his lap. To his left are several cut logs. The background features a mountain range with snow-capped peaks and evergreen trees. A large tree trunk is on the right side of the frame.

He used to go every day into the mountains to cut firewood, which he brought home and tied into bundles.

Then he would have breakfast and walk into the nearest town, where he would sell his wood and rest for a time before returning home.



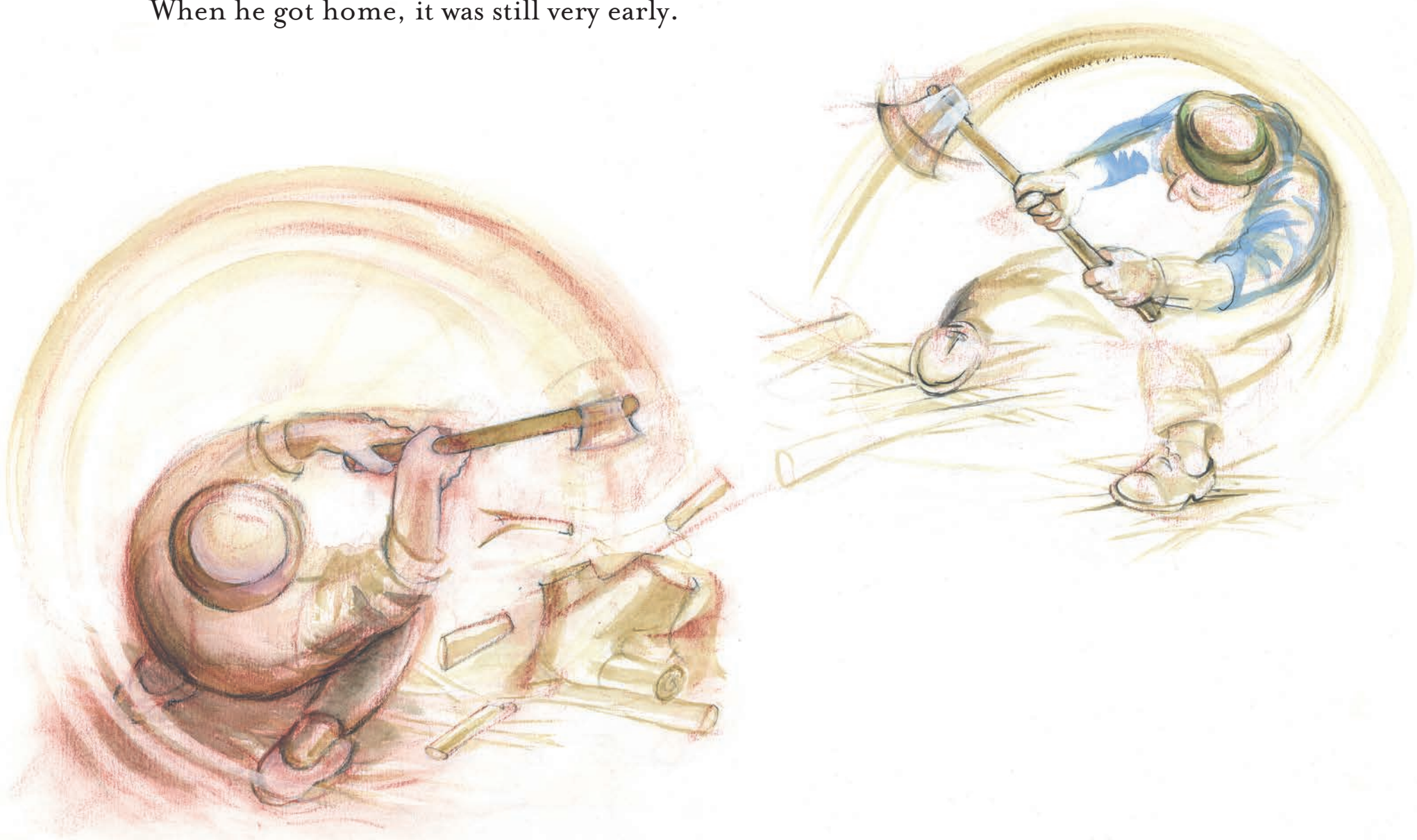
One day, when he got home very late, the girl said to him,
'Father, I sometimes wish that we would have some nicer food
and different kinds of things to eat.'

'Very well, my child,' said the man, 'tomorrow I shall get up
much earlier than I usually do, go further into the mountains
where there is more wood and bring back a much larger
quantity than usual. I shall get home earlier, bundle the wood
sooner, and go into town to sell it so as to have more money.
Then I will bring you back all kinds of nice things to eat.'

The next morning the wood-cutter rose before dawn and went into the mountains.

He worked very hard cutting wood, trimming it and making it into a huge bundle, which he carried on his back to his little house.

When he got home, it was still very early.



He put his load of wood down
and knocked on the door,
saying, 'Daughter, Daughter,
open the door, for I am
hungry and thirsty and I need
a meal before I go to market.'



But the door was locked. The wood-cutter was so tired that he lay down and was soon fast asleep beside his bundle.

The little girl, having forgotten all about their conversation the night before, was fast asleep in bed.





When he woke up a few hours later, the sun was high.

The wood-cutter knocked at the door again and again and said,

'Daughter, Daughter, come quickly. I must have a little food and go to market to sell the wood, for it is already much later than my usual time of starting.'



But, still not remembering the conversation the night before, the little girl had got up, tidied the house, and gone out for a walk.

She had locked the door, assuming in her forgetfulness that her father was still in town.



The wood-cutter thought to himself,
'It is now rather late to go into town.
I shall therefore return to the
mountains and cut another bundle
of wood, and tomorrow I shall take
a double load to market.'

All that day the man toiled in the
mountains, cutting wood and
shaping the branches. When he got
home with the wood on his shoulders,
it was evening.







He put down his burden behind the house, knocked on the door, and said, 'Daughter, Daughter, open the door for I am tired, and I have eaten nothing all the day. I have a double bundle of wood that I hope to take to market tomorrow. Tonight I must sleep well so that I will be strong.'

But there was no answer, for the little girl had felt very sleepy when she came home, and had made a meal for herself, and gone to bed.

She had been rather worried at first that her father was not at home, but she decided that he must have arranged to stay in the town overnight.

Once again, the wood-cutter, tired, hungry and thirsty, finding that he could not get into the house, lay down by his bundles of wood and fell fast asleep. He could not keep awake although he was fearful for what might have happened to the little girl.



Now, the wood-cutter, because he was so cold and hungry and tired, woke up very, very early the next morning before it was even light.

He sat up and looked around, but he could not see anything.

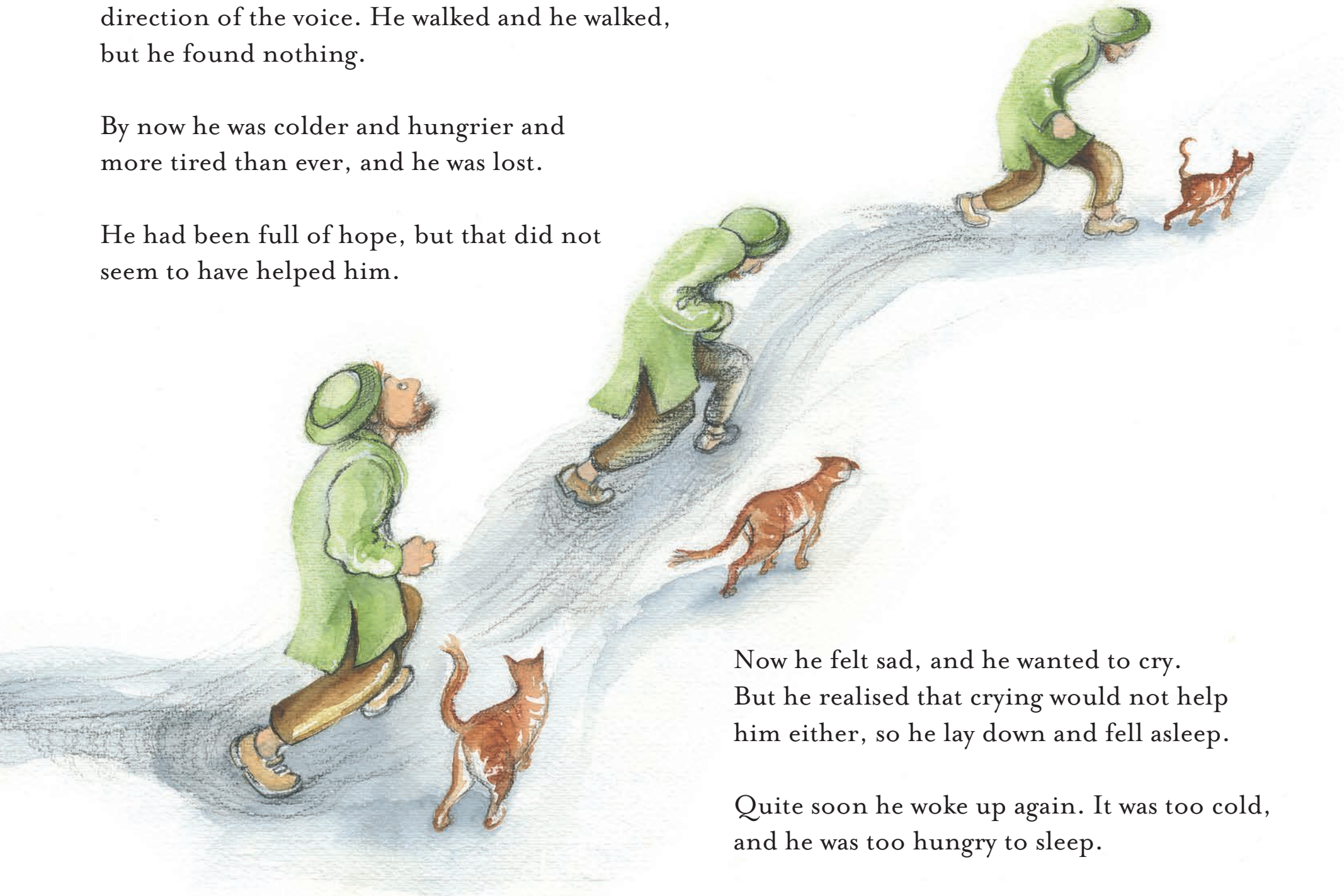
And then a strange thing happened.

The wood-cutter thought he heard a voice saying, 'Hurry, hurry! Leave your wood and come this way. If you need enough, and you want little enough, you shall have delicious food.'

The wood-cutter stood up and walked in the direction of the voice. He walked and he walked, but he found nothing.

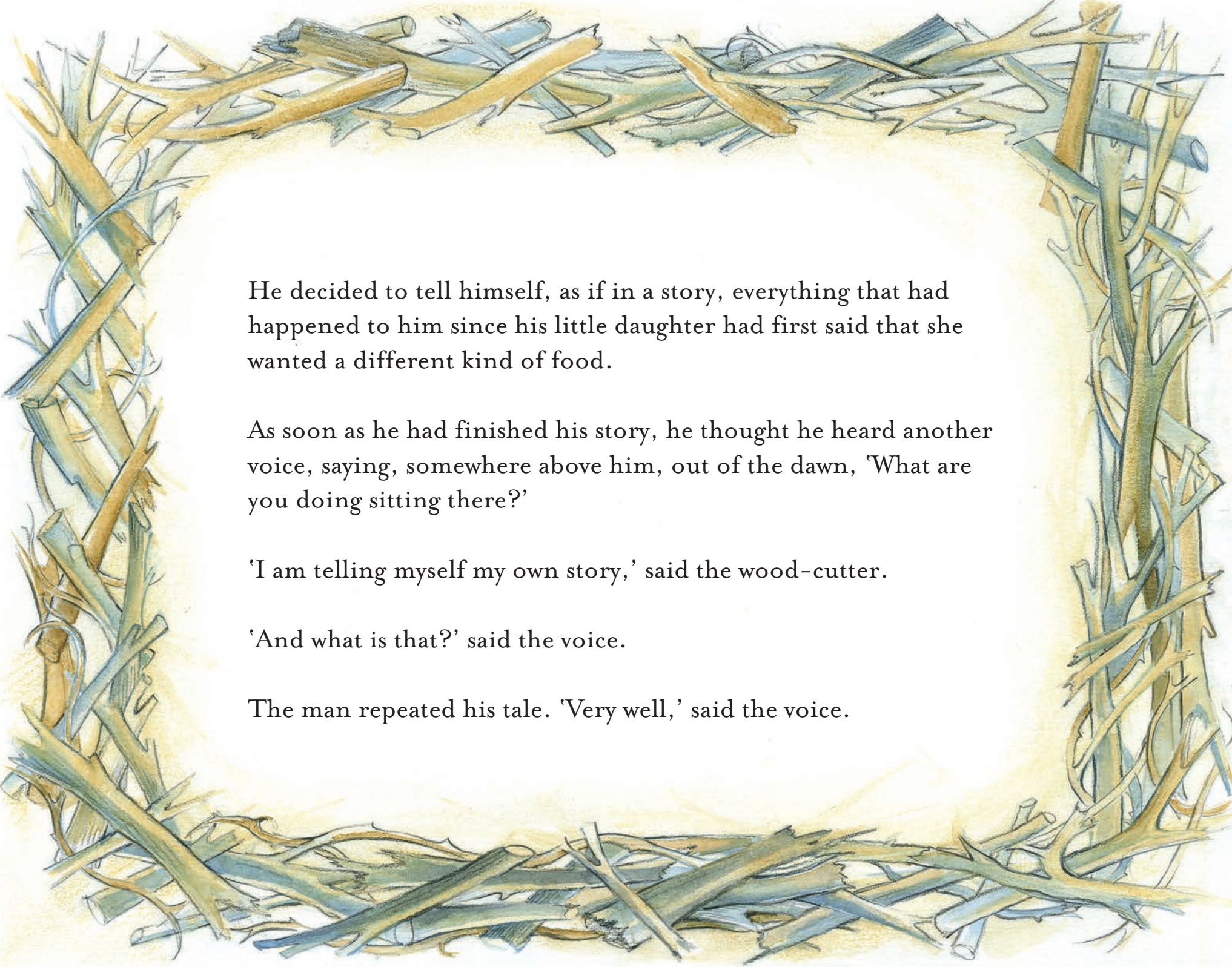
By now he was colder and hungrier and more tired than ever, and he was lost.

He had been full of hope, but that did not seem to have helped him.



Now he felt sad, and he wanted to cry. But he realised that crying would not help him either, so he lay down and fell asleep.

Quite soon he woke up again. It was too cold, and he was too hungry to sleep.



He decided to tell himself, as if in a story, everything that had happened to him since his little daughter had first said that she wanted a different kind of food.

As soon as he had finished his story, he thought he heard another voice, saying, somewhere above him, out of the dawn, 'What are you doing sitting there?'

'I am telling myself my own story,' said the wood-cutter.

'And what is that?' said the voice.

The man repeated his tale. 'Very well,' said the voice.

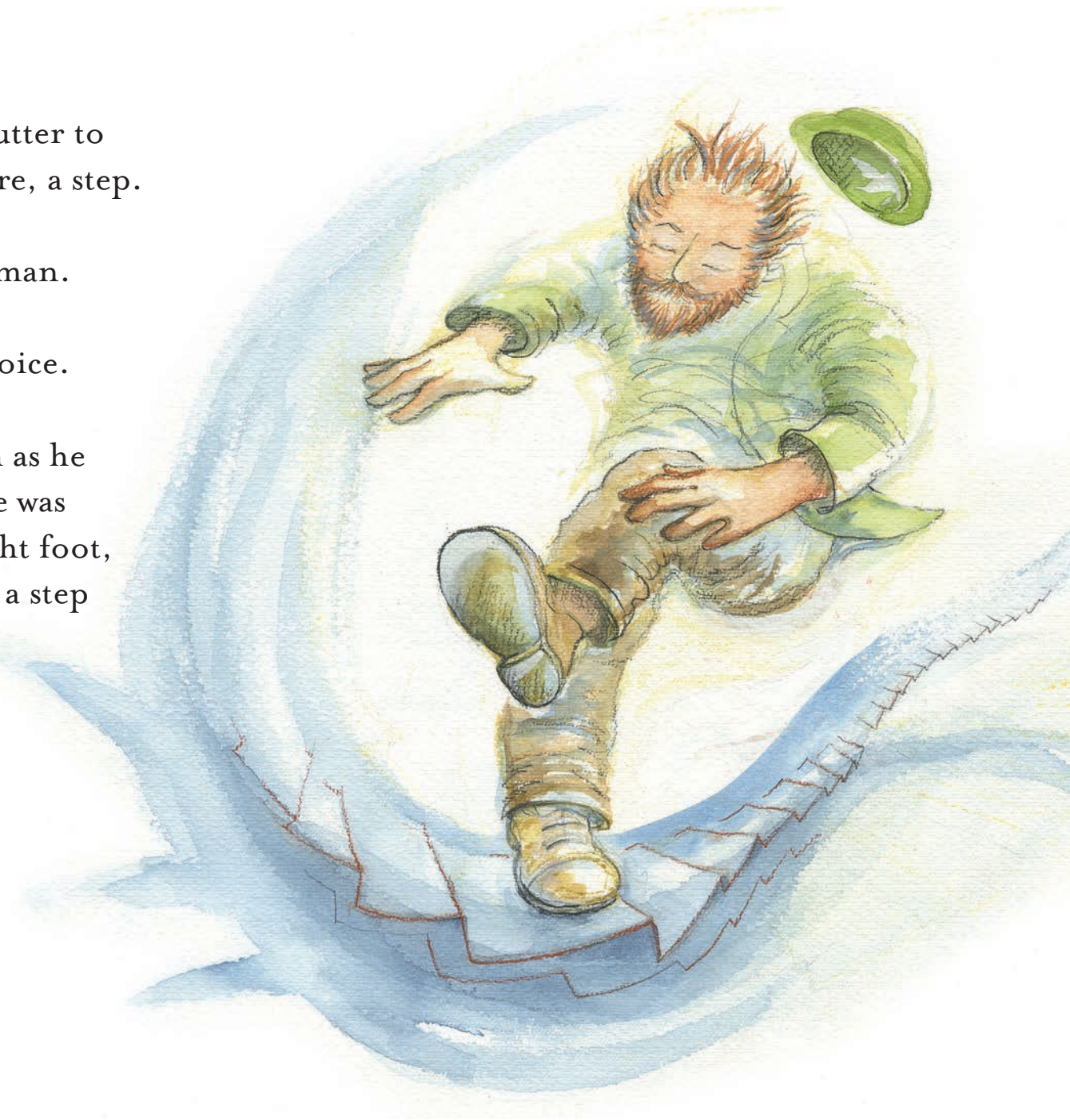
And then the voice told the wood-cutter to close his eyes and to mount, as it were, a step.

'But I do not see any step,' said the man.

'Never mind. Do as I say,' said the voice.

The man did as he was told. As soon as he had closed his eyes, he found that he was standing up, and as he raised his right foot, he felt that there was something like a step under it. He started to ascend what seemed to be a staircase.

Suddenly the whole flight of steps started to move, very fast, and the voice said, 'Do not open your eyes until I tell you to do so.'



In a very short time, the voice told the man to open his eyes.

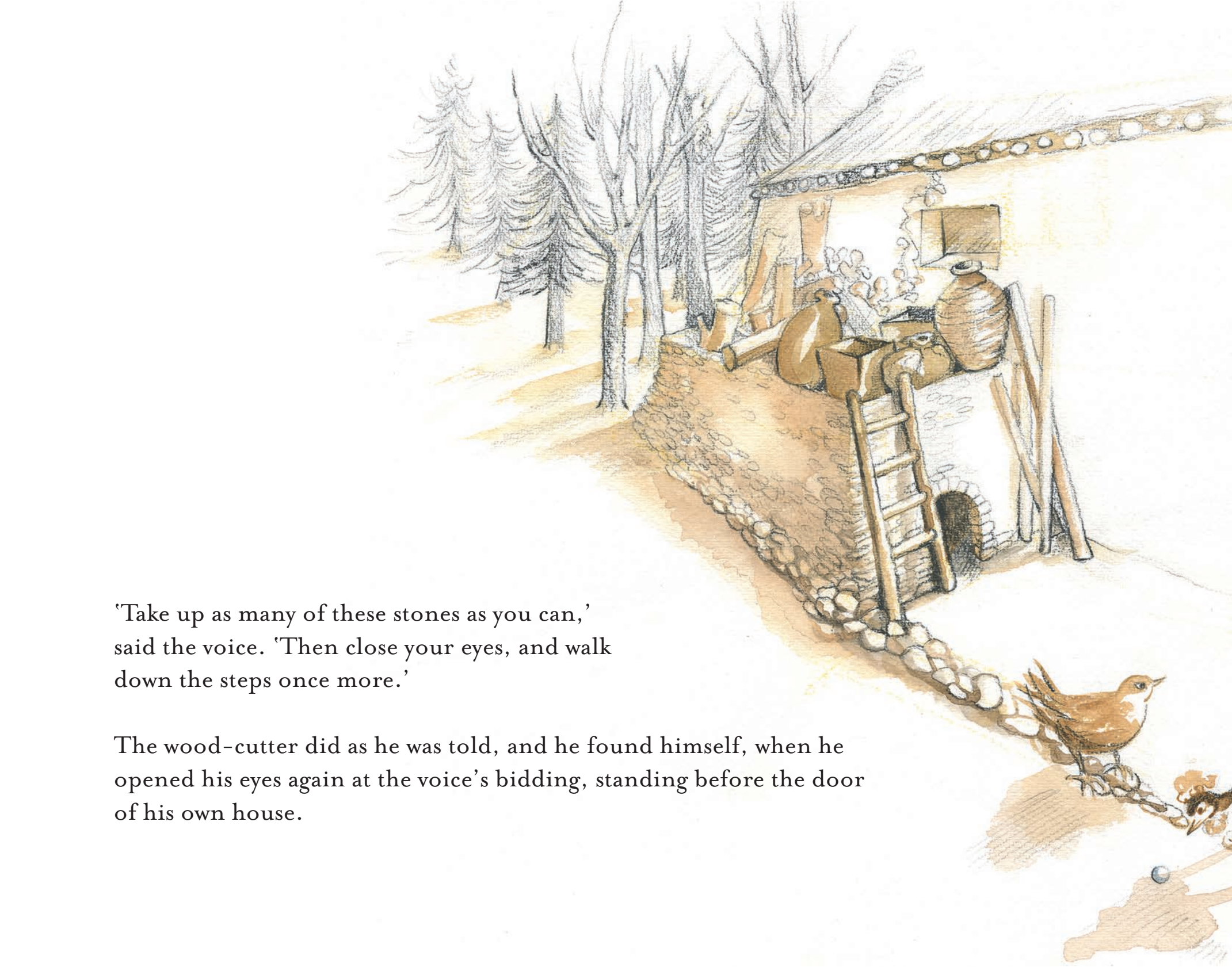
When he did, he found that he was in a place that looked rather like a desert, with the sun beating down on him.

He was surrounded by masses and masses of pebbles – pebbles of all colours: red, green, blue, and white. But he seemed to be alone.

He looked all around him and could not see anyone, but the voice started to speak again.







'Take up as many of these stones as you can,'
said the voice. 'Then close your eyes, and walk
down the steps once more.'

The wood-cutter did as he was told, and he found himself, when he
opened his eyes again at the voice's bidding, standing before the door
of his own house.



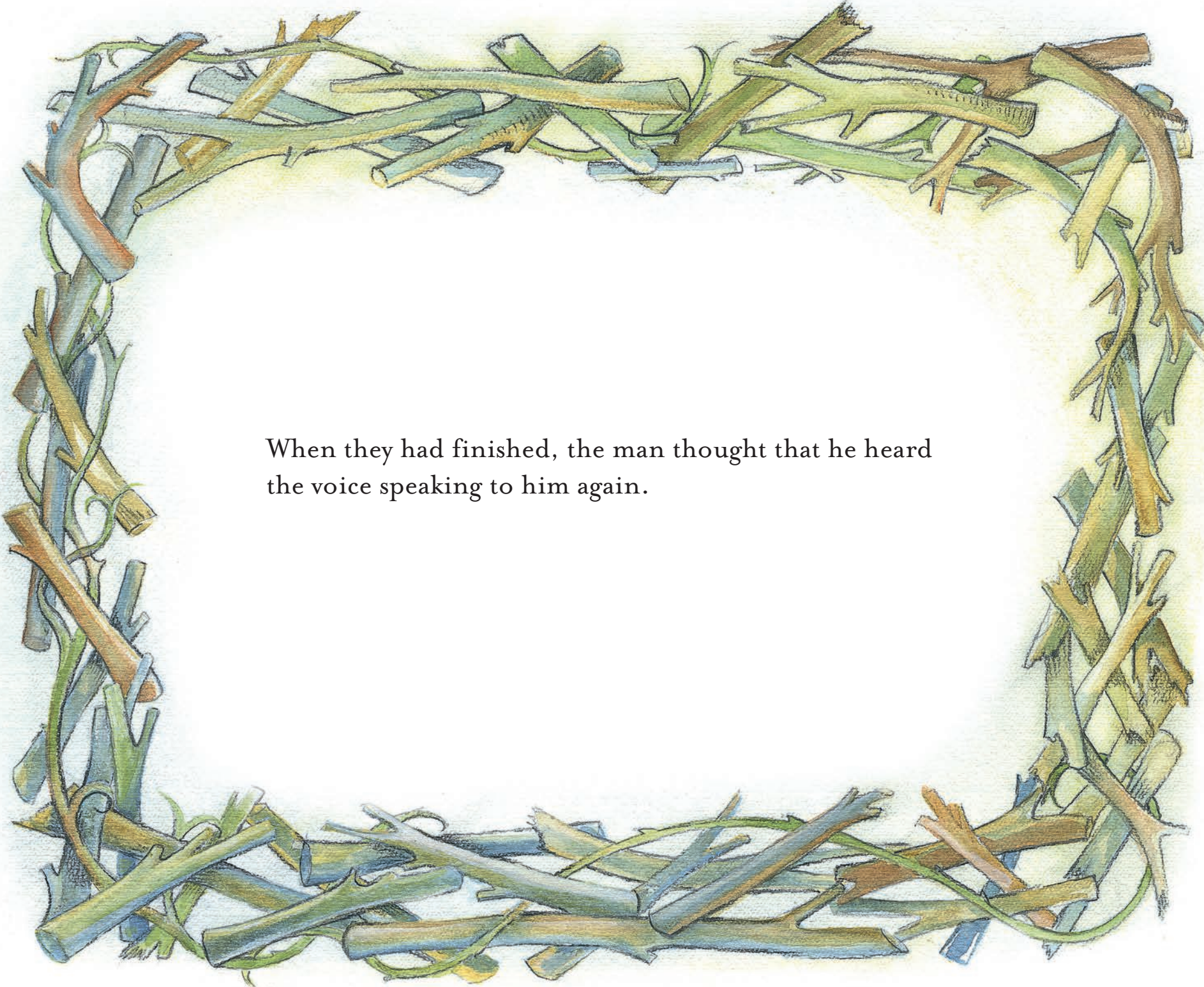


He knocked at the door, and his little daughter answered it.

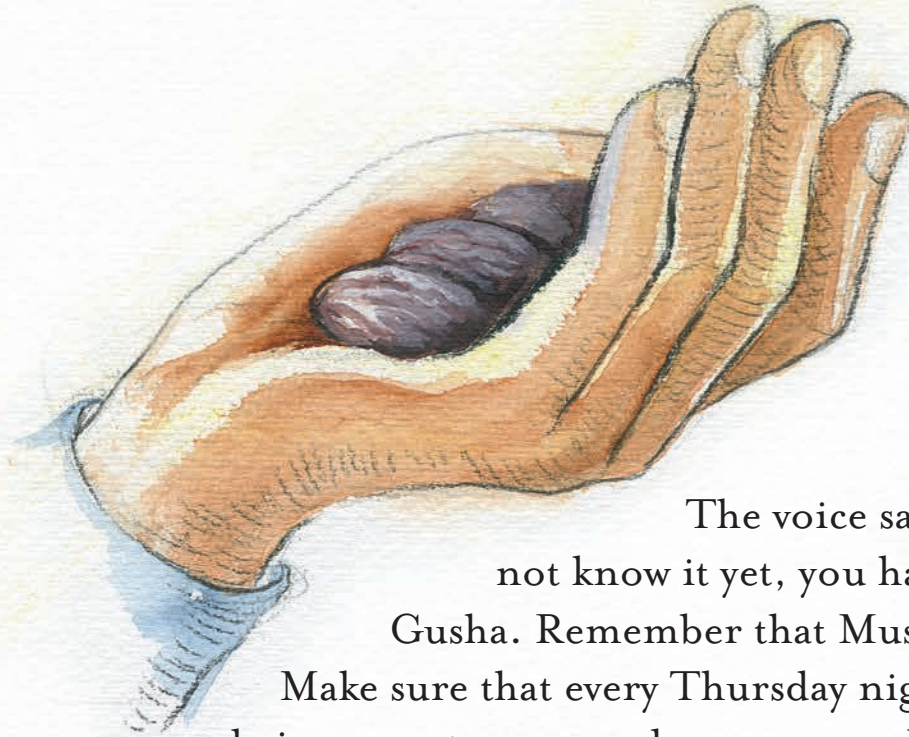
She asked him where he had been, and he told her, but it all sounded so confusing that she could hardly understand what he was saying.

They went into the house, and the little girl and her father shared the last food they had, which was a handful of dried dates.



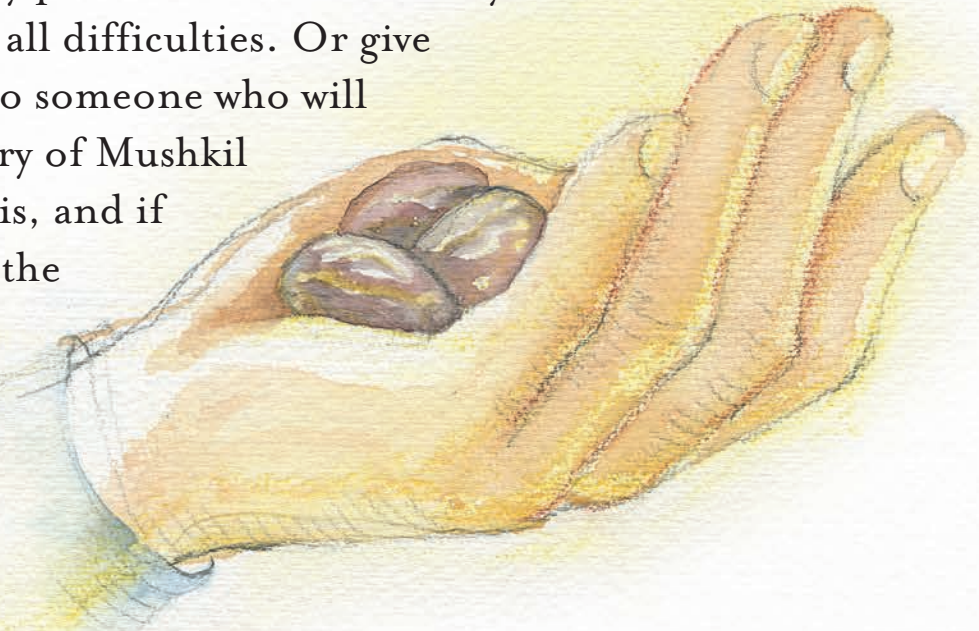


When they had finished, the man thought that he heard
the voice speaking to him again.



The voice said, 'Although you may not know it yet, you have been saved by Mushkil Gusha. Remember that Mushkil Gusha is always here.

Make sure that every Thursday night you eat some dates and give some to any needy person, and tell the story of Mushkil Gusha, the remover of all difficulties. Or give a gift in the name of Mushkil Gusha to someone who will help the needy. Make sure that the story of Mushkil Gusha is never forgotten. If you do this, and if this is done by those to whom you tell the story, the people who are in real need will always find their way.'

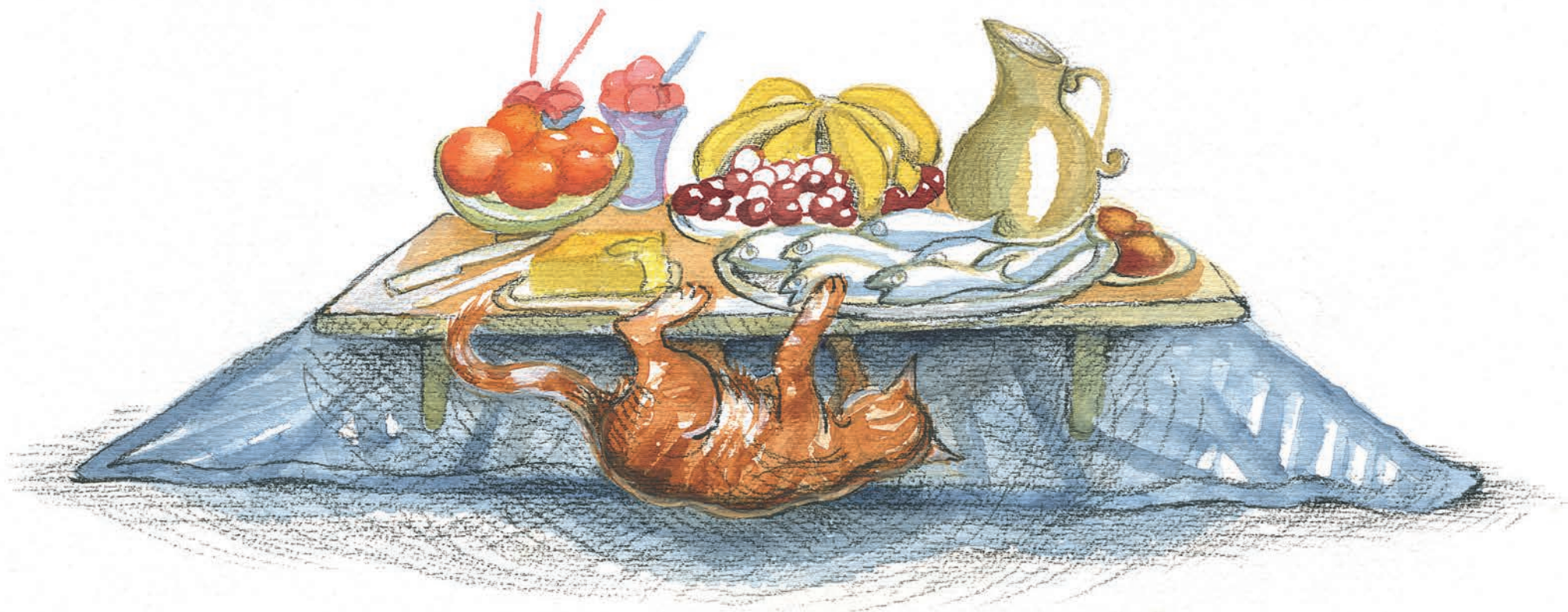


The wood-cutter put all the stones that he had brought back from the desert in a corner of his little house.

They looked very much like ordinary stones, and he did not know what to do with them.

The next day he took his two enormous bundles of wood to the market and sold them easily for a high price.





When he got home, he showed his daughter all sorts of delicious kinds of food that she had never tasted before. When they had eaten it, the wood-cutter said, 'Now I am going to tell you the whole story of Mushkil Gusha. Mushkil Gusha is the remover of all difficulties. Our difficulties have been removed through Mushkil Gusha, and we must always remember it.'

For nearly a week after that, the man carried on as usual.

He went into the mountains, brought back wood, had a meal, took the wood to market, and sold it.

He always found a buyer without difficulty.

Now, the next Thursday came, and, as is the way of men, the wood-cutter forgot to repeat the tale of Mushkil Gusha.

Late that evening, in the house of the wood-cutter's neighbours, the fire had gone out. The neighbours had nothing with which to re-light the fire, and they went to the house of the wood-cutter.

They said, 'Neighbour, neighbour, please give us a light from those wonderful lamps of yours that we see shining through the window.'

'What lamps?' said the wood-cutter.

'Come outside,' said the neighbours, 'and see what we mean.'

So the wood-cutter went outside, and then he saw, sure enough, all kinds of brilliant lights shining through the window from the inside.





He went back to the house and saw that the light was streaming from the pile of pebbles that he had put in the corner.

But the rays of light were cold, and it was not possible to use them to light a fire.

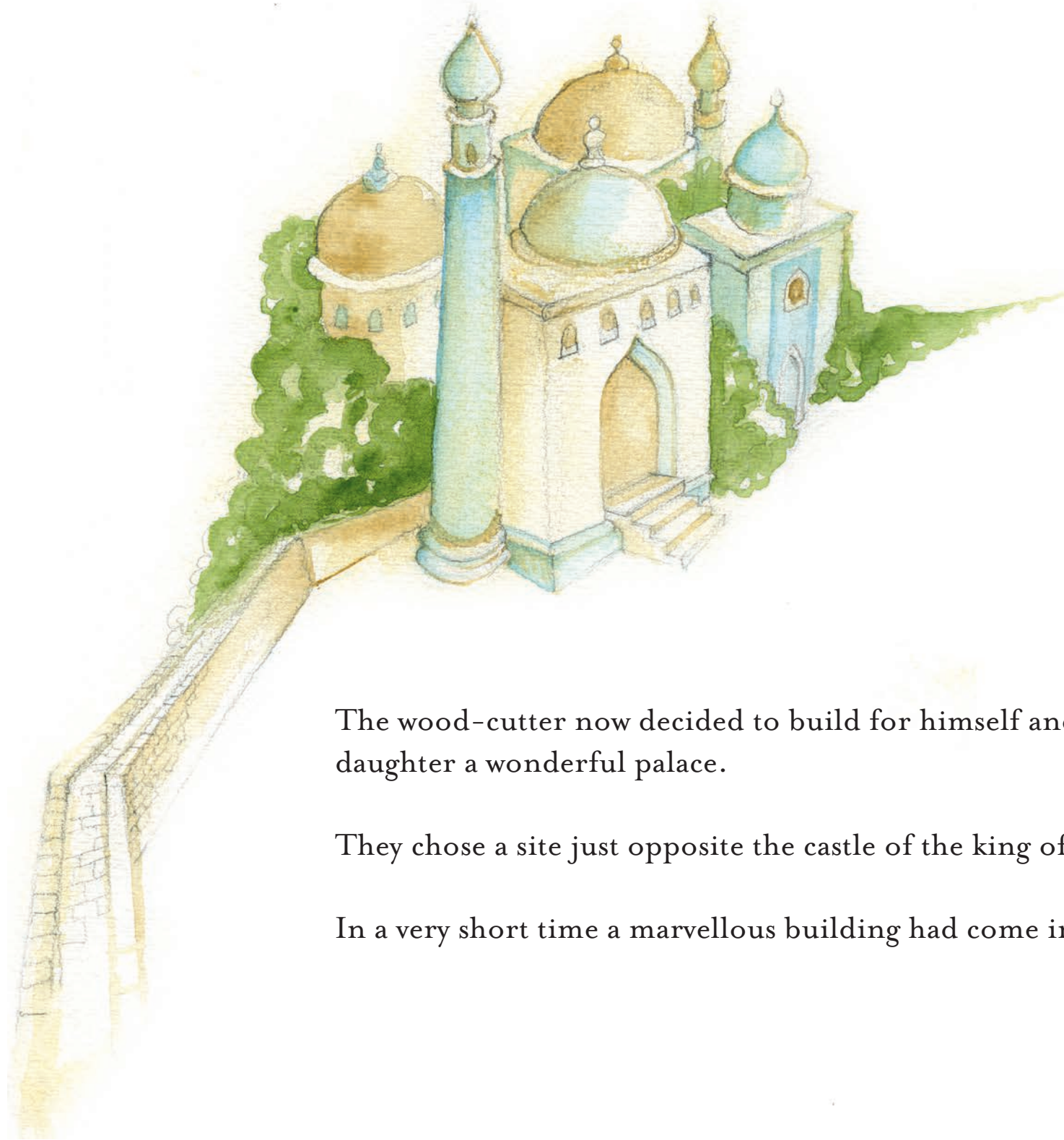
So he went out to the neighbours and said, 'Neighbours, I am sorry, but I have no fire.' And he banged the door in their faces.

They were annoyed and confused and went back to their house, muttering.
They leave our story here.

The wood-cutter and his daughter quickly covered up the brilliant lights with every piece of cloth they could find for fear that someone would see what a treasure they had.

The next morning, when they uncovered the stones, they discovered that they were precious, luminous gems.

They took the jewels, one by one, to neighbouring towns, where they sold them for a huge price.



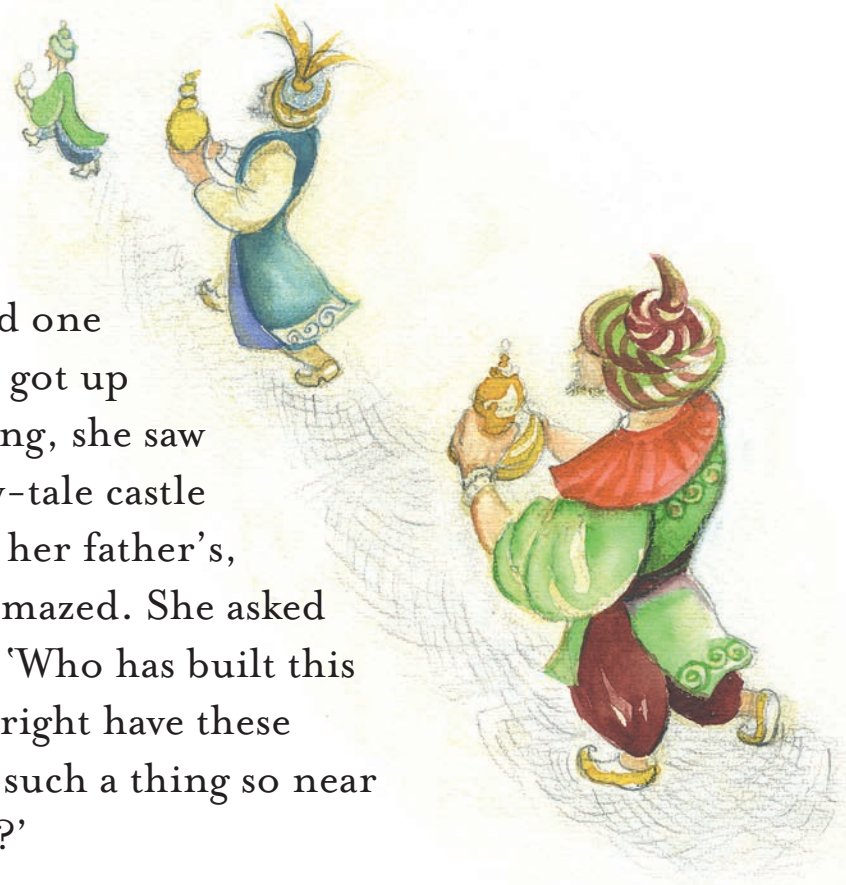
The wood-cutter now decided to build for himself and for his daughter a wonderful palace.

They chose a site just opposite the castle of the king of their country.

In a very short time a marvellous building had come into being.



Now, that particular king had a beautiful daughter, and one day when she got up in the morning, she saw a sort of fairy-tale castle just opposite her father's, and she was amazed. She asked her servants, 'Who has built this castle? What right have these people to do such a thing so near to our home?'



The servants went away and made enquiries, and they came back and told the story, as far as they could recollect it, to the princess.

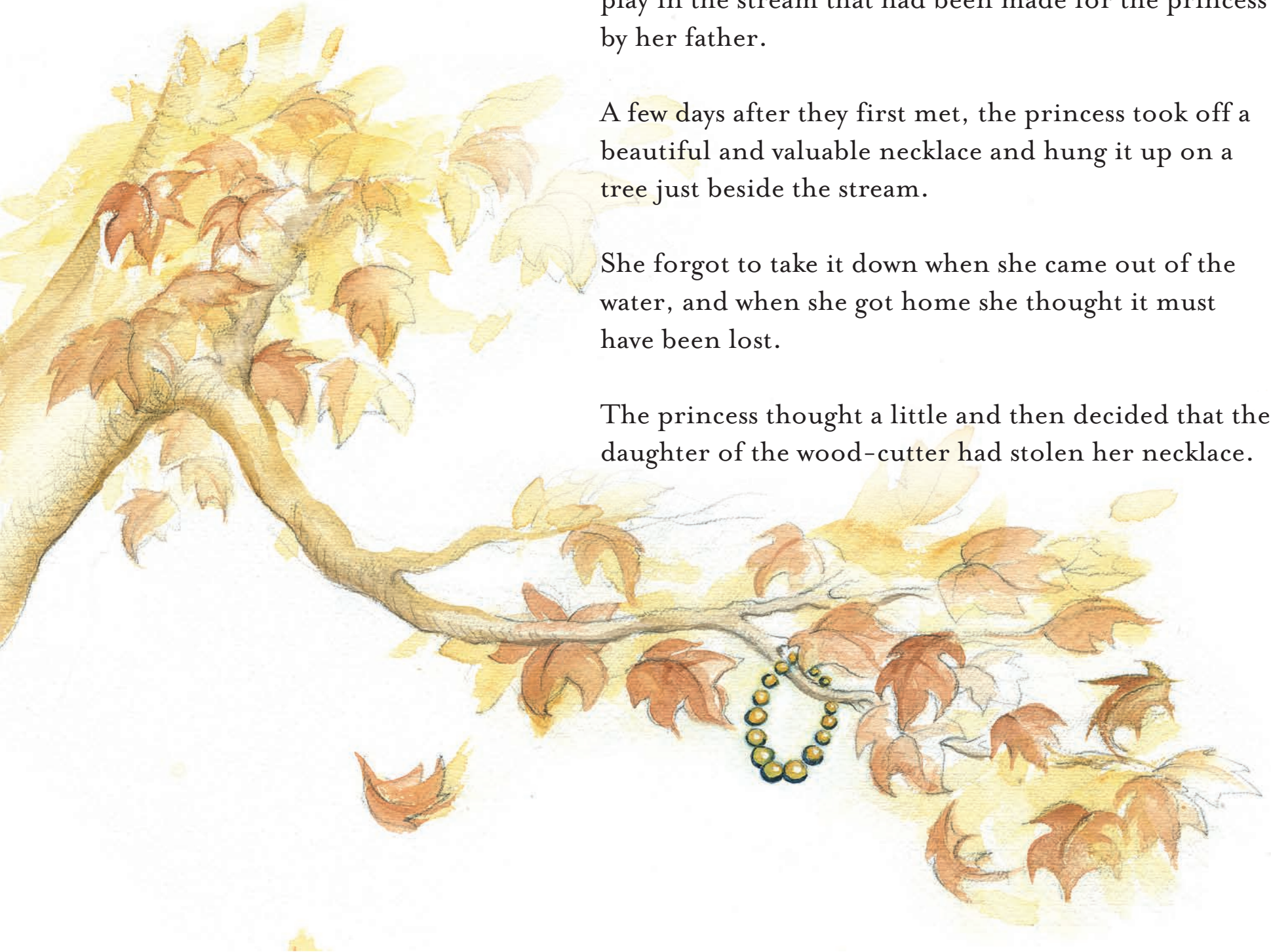
The princess called for the little daughter of the wood-cutter, for she was angry with her, but when the two girls met and talked, they soon became fast friends.

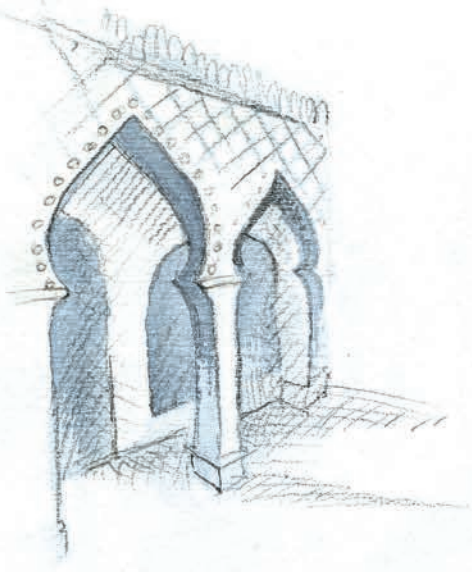
They started to meet every day and went to swim and play in the stream that had been made for the princess by her father.

A few days after they first met, the princess took off a beautiful and valuable necklace and hung it up on a tree just beside the stream.

She forgot to take it down when she came out of the water, and when she got home she thought it must have been lost.

The princess thought a little and then decided that the daughter of the wood-cutter had stolen her necklace.





She told her father, and he had the wood-cutter arrested. He also confiscated the castle and took everything that the wood-cutter had.

The wood-cutter was thrown into prison, and the daughter was put into an orphanage.



As was the custom in that country, after a period of time the wood-cutter was taken from the dungeon and put in the public square, chained to a post, with a sign around his neck. On the sign was written:

'This is what happens to those who steal from kings.'

At first people gathered around him and jeered and threw things at him.

But quite soon, as is the way of men, everyone became used to the sight of the man sitting there by his post and took very little notice of him.



Sometimes people threw him scraps of food or a few coins; sometimes they did not.

One day he overheard somebody saying that it was Thursday afternoon, and he remembered how he had forgotten to mark the day.

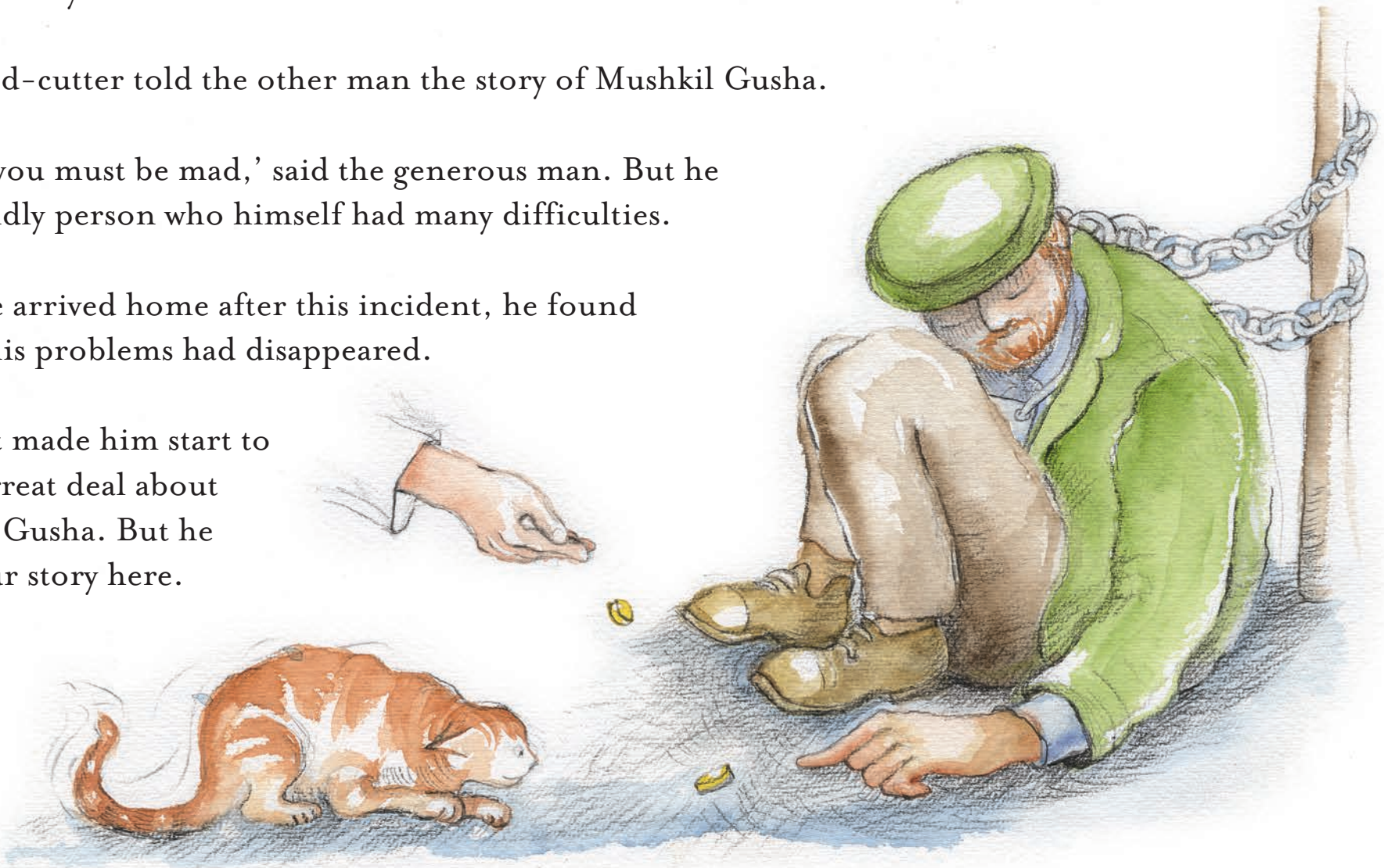
Quickly, he called out to a passer-by, inviting him to buy a handful of dates from a nearby stall and come and sit with him for a moment or two.

The wood-cutter told the other man the story of Mushkil Gusha.

'I think you must be mad,' said the generous man. But he was a kindly person who himself had many difficulties.

When he arrived home after this incident, he found that all his problems had disappeared.

And that made him start to think a great deal about Mushkil Gusha. But he leaves our story here.

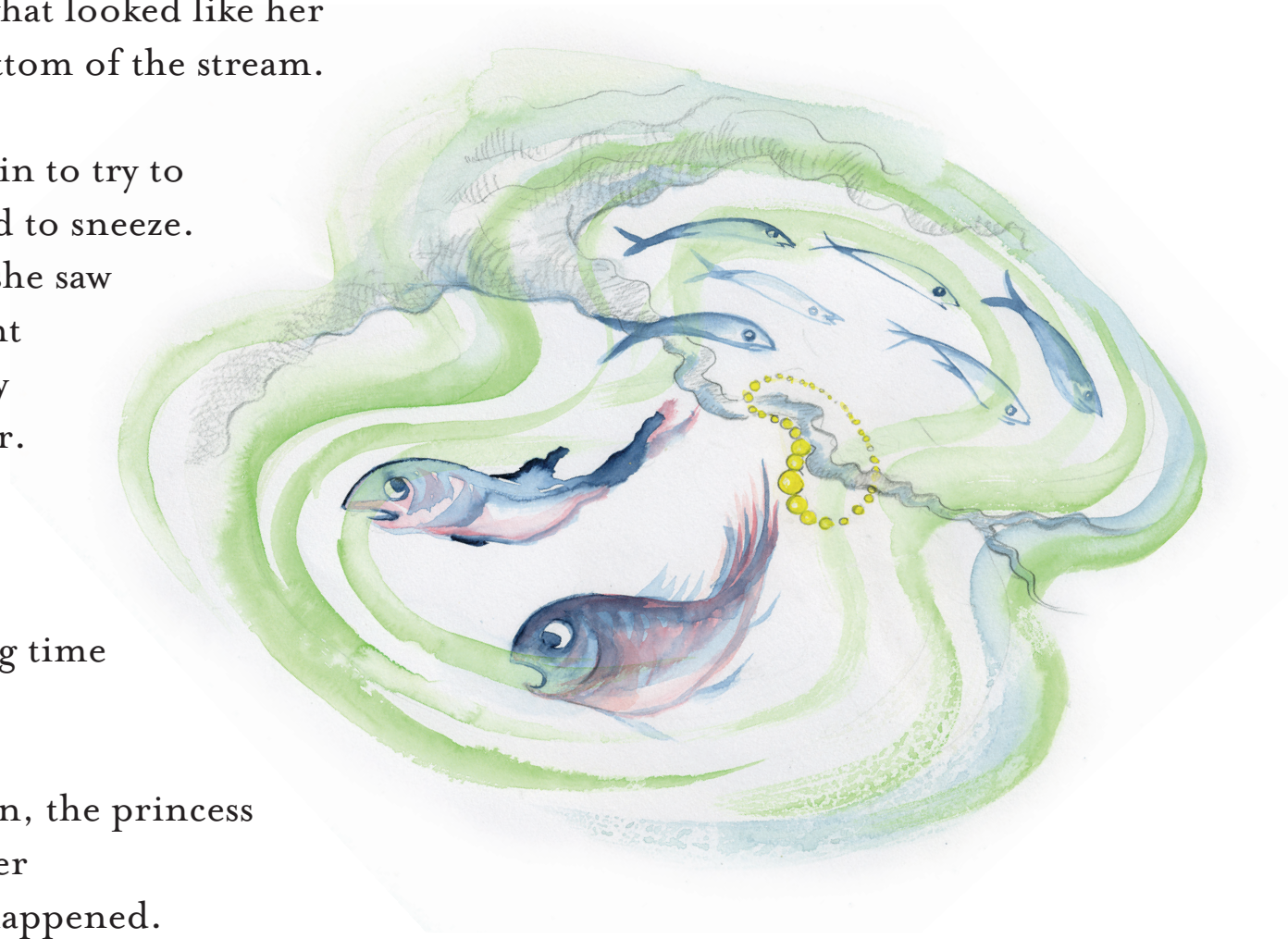


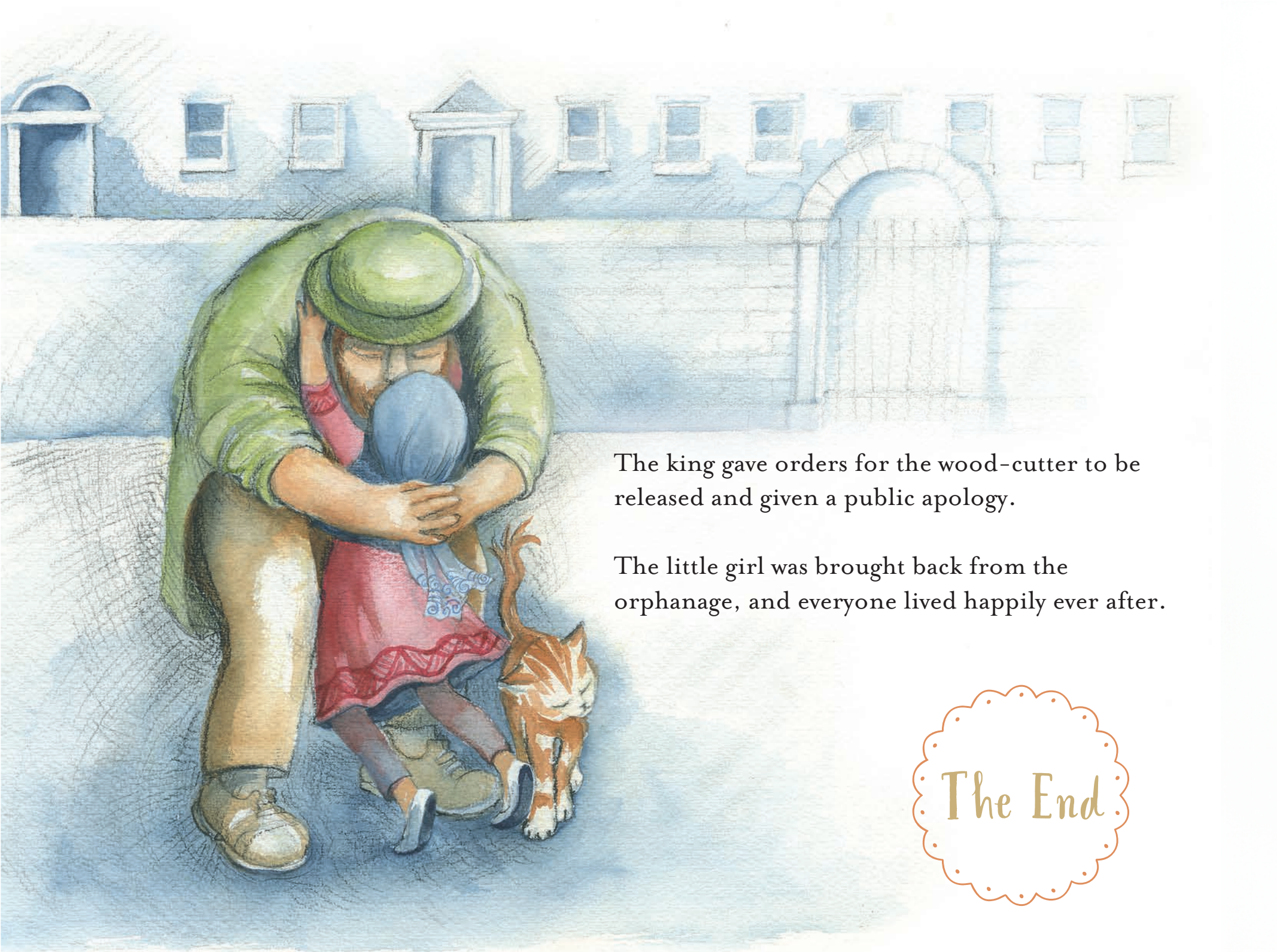
The very next morning the princess went back to her bathing-place. As she was about to go into the water, she saw what looked like her necklace down at the bottom of the stream.

As she was going to dive in to try to get it back, she happened to sneeze. Her head went up, and she saw that what she had thought was the necklace was only its reflection in the water.

It was hanging on the bough of the tree where she had left it such a long time before.

Taking the necklace down, the princess ran excitedly to her father and told him what had happened.





The king gave orders for the wood-cutter to be released and given a public apology.

The little girl was brought back from the orphanage, and everyone lived happily ever after.

The End

These are some of the incidents in the story of Mushkil Gusha. It is a very long tale, and it is never ended.

It has many forms. Some of them are even not called the story of Mushkil Gusha at all, so people do not recognise it.

But it is because of Mushkil Gusha that his story, in whatever form, is remembered by somebody, somewhere in the world, day and night, wherever there are people. As his story had always been recited, so it will always continue to be told.

Will you repeat the story of Mushkil Gusha on Thursday nights and help the work of Mushkil Gusha?



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